Government is closely monitoring the situation in Afghanistan and is in close and regular touch with the Interim Administration of Afghanistan to ensure that Indian interests in Afghanistan are fully protected.

Chinese Reaction to US Statement to use Nuclear Weapons

5308. SHRI AIMADUDDIN AHMAD KHAN (DURRU): Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government's attention has been drawn to the statement of Chinese Vice-Foreign Minister Mr. Lizhaoxing, as reported in the "Hindu" dated March 18, 2002 attacking US for its Nuclear Posture Review and charging the US of nuclear black-mail of China, in reference to the US President's recent statement that the US would use nuclear weapons against 7 countries including China and Russia; and

(b) if so, Government's reaction in the context of deteriorating Sino-US relations and its impact on World peace especially the peace-scenario in South Asia?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH): (a) and (b) Government has seen media reports and commentaries on the latest US Nuclear Posture Review. Official statement by the US Government have described the Review as "not an operational planning document". The impact of nuclear policy of the US on its bilateral relations with China is for the two countries to assess. As far as India is concerned, it has been out long-standing policy to seek systematic restraints on use of nuclear weapons through a range of well-considered steps.

Assistance of Afghanistan in farm sector

5309. SHRIMATI VANGA GEETHA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Afghanistan has sough India's expertise in sericulture seed processing, poultry, fishing and veterinary services, besides agricultural equipments and help in farm sector;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the action taken to help that country before the sowing season starts?

THE MINISTRY OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH): (a) to (c) During the visit of H.E. Hamid Karzai Chairman of the Afghan Interim Administration to India on 26-27 February 2002, many areas were identified for bilateral cooperation, including proposals for assistance in the field for Agriculture. Through subsequent technical discussions, including during the visit of Afghan Minister of Agriculture Mr. Seyyed Hussain Anwari in April this year, steps have been taken to provide assitance, *inter alia*, through supply of seeds, equipment and training of personnel.

SAARC Finance and Planning Ministers' meeting on Poverty Alleviation

5310. SHRI A. VIJAYA RAGHAVAN: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the latest SAARC Finance and Planning Ministers' meeting on poverty alleviation has endorsed an action plan for full operationalisation of the South Asia Preferential Trade Agreement (SAPTA) and move faster towards South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA);

(b) if so, the details of the action plan along with the details of the Indian experiment on poverty alleviation reflected in the above meetng; and

(c) the steps taken, if any for more flexibility in the matters related to Intellectual Property Rights of developing country?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI OMAR ABDULLAH): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) the Action Plan recommended internal policies including the need for good governance, sound macro-economic policies, decentralization, empowerment of local government micro-credits, expansion of social safety nets and better targeting of benefits on both urban and rual poor.

External policies recommendation include asking developed countries for increased ODA, greater market excess, reducing of burden of external borrowings and debts and preventing outflow of illegal and tax evaded money from the region.